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By "THE DUCHESS."

Mrs Maggie Argles

BETTY'S VISIONS.

By RHODA BROUGHTON.

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George Munro

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UGLY BARRINGTON.

By "THE DUCHESS."

Margaret Hamilton Hungerford
Formerly Mrs Argles

BETTY'S VISIONS.

By RHODA BROUGHTON.

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UGLY BARRINGTON.

By "THE DUCHESS."

CHAPTER I.

"Straining harsh discords and
Unpleasing sharps."

"THERE are limits to one's patience!" says Sir Wilding, frowning heavily. He is standing on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, and has taken up a distinctly menacing position.

"To yours, certainly," replies his daughter, with a faint sneer.

She is a slight girl, with a strangely beautiful face, large dark expressive eyes, and a mutinous mouth. She is holding her head very haughtily just now, and has defiance written in every curve of her lissom figure, in every feature of her perfect face.

"Let us talk sense," says Sir Wilding, either too accustomed to her irreverence—which is not altogether undeserved—or too prudent to notice it. "You must accept Barrington."

"Why?"

"Why? Why should you not?"

"Why should I? You have not answered that."

"For many reasons. We are miserably poor, and he is the richest man we know, for one."

"And the ugliest, for two! That balances your one, and leaves the scales as they were before."

"He is a thoroughly good fellow, for another," says Sir Wilding, who detests George Barrington with all his soul.

"A late discovery."

"Never mind how late. He is at least worth a dozen such fellows as Mervyn."

"A still later discovery," says Miss Brand, with a second sneer. "Why, it was only last night you were singing Mr. Mervyn's praises!"

"Be it so. Yet I desire that for the future your acquaintance with him shall cease."

"As we are on the subject of reasons, you will perhaps give me one for this sudden command," says the girl, who has grown rather white; but whether from anger or some deeper emotion it would be difficult to decide.

"Certainly not. Why should I? But I shall see that I am obeyed."

"Take care! I am not your slave," says she, with flashing eyes and colorless lips. She goes a step nearer to him. "Why am I to regard Mr. Mervyn as a stranger?"

"He is an idle unprincipled fellow, thoroughly worthless—"

"And *poor!*" interrupts she, in an inexplicable tone.

"That has nothing to do with it. Worthlessness is one thing, poverty another; one is disreputable, the other—a—a misfortune. *I* am poor," says Sir Wilding, drawing himself up with a gesture that would be noble but for something in

the whole air of the man that renders it ludicrous, if not contemptible.

His daughter, failing, apparently, to see the ludicrous side of it, lowers her head.

"I have learned many things of late of this Mervyn," goes on Sir Wilding pompously. "He is a mere adventurer, living from hand to mouth. The little property he has here is mortgaged, I understand, up to the hilt. He is no fit associate for us."

"A very fit associate, if he be, as you say, an adventurer. What better are we?" asks she, throwing out her hand, and turning upon him with a gesture of superb disdain. In this disdain it is impossible to misunderstand that she includes herself.

"You forget yourself," says her father coldly.

She lets her hand fall to her side, and a bitter smile creeps over her face.

"Since when have we become too respectable for Mr. Mervyn?" she asks. "Is he altogether ruined, then? Is he no longer of any use to you at écarté? Is his last shilling gone?"

"Do not provoke me too far," says Sir Wilding, flushing darkly; "you are a woman, and your insult is beneath notice. Mervyn is as I found him, so far as his pocket is concerned. What mischief he may have incurred at your hands is another matter, and quite your own affair. I do not seek to look into it; but I will have the intimacy with him ended *now*. I will not have him coming here making love to you. Understand me once for all. If he darkens my door again I shall horsewhip him."

"He is the younger man; take care he does not horsewhip you!" says Miss Brand, in a low but furious tone.

"Florence! How *dare* you speak to me like that?"

"How dare *you* incense me as you do? Is the child to concede all to the parent, and the parent nothing to the child? You gave me my nature, and now you taunt me with it. What does St. Paul say? 'Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.'"

"Don't quote St. Paul to me," says Sir Wilding. That he is somewhat ignorant of the New Testament may be inferred from the fact that he does not at this moment quote back a crushing text to *her*.

"Ah, you don't like home truths," retorts she triumphantly.

"I don't like ill-breeding in any shape or form. When you lose your temper, you lose your dignity, and you also lose sight of the fact that distasteful repartee always borders on vulgarity. Let us talk sense."

"With all my heart," says Miss Brand. "But if, by the sense, I am to understand you mean talking me into accepting Mr. Barrington, I tell you honestly it will be time thrown away."

"What is your objection to him?"

"Of course, the great objection is that I really don't care whether he be dead or alive. One *should* care a little, I think, about the man one marries, but it would be impossible to care for him; and he is so ugly."

"Pshaw! a mere girl's fad. Six months after matrimony beauty and ugliness are of equal value."

"I dare say. But at least for the six months, I suppose, the beauty counts for something."

"You are thinking of Mervyn!" exclaims he angrily.

"One must think of something."

"Then think of Barrington."

"No, thank you. He doesn't suit me in the least."

"You are a fool!" says Sir Wilding savagely.

"And your daughter," retorts she, with an irritating laugh. "I dare say that sort of infirmity runs in the blood. There—don't lose your temper; remember your dignity and your lecture of a moment since."

Here it occurs to Sir Wilding that his daughter may be more than a match for him. He refrains, therefore, from indignant rejoinder, and, turning, takes up the poker and molests the coals with a vengeance. The flames, darting up, illumine both faces, so strangely like, yet so strangely unlike.

"There is something I must tell you, Florence," says her father at length huskily.

He still holds the poker in his hand in an unconscious fashion, and keeps his face turned well away from her. If he is afraid of anything on earth it is the cold contemptuous eyes of his only child.

"Well?" says Miss Brand indifferently.

"I don't know if what I am going to say will have the least weight with you. You have always been so undutiful in your conduct toward me," says Sir Wilding fretfully, with all the air of a man who is about to relate a grievance rather than a backsliding, "that I dare say you will treat my communication with disrespect; but as it concerns you

as well as me, and as George Barrington's proposal has brought matters to a climax, I feel it had better be told."

"What is it?" says Florence, feeling something akin to fear at her heart. She drops into a chair near her, and, resting her elbow on the table, regards her father with keen but troubled eyes.

"It all lies in a nutshell," says he, fidgeting nervously. "During the past two years I have borrowed money from *old* Barrington—the father—that I never can repay."

Beyond the fact that her eyes have grown even harder, Miss Brand betrays no sign of having heard him.

"There is but one way of saving my honor," says Sir Wilding, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other. "I have no money to meet his demands, as you probably know. Even if I sacrificed the furniture, it would not bring in a fourth of the sum. There is really nothing to be sold—"

"Except me," says Florence Brand, in a clear metallic tone.

Her father, who has not dared to look at her, lets the poker fall from his hand now with a noisy clatter, and busies himself picking it up again as a means of covering his confusion.

"I am the one way, I suppose," she says presently.

"Your marriage with George Barrington, if you could bring yourself to think of it," says Sir Wilding, in a tone that is meant to be pleading, but is only servile, "would settle everything. His father tells me George has set his heart on you. He came here yesterday to speak to me about it, and—and—"

To Florence his words convey the idea that it was George Barrington, *not* his father, who came yesterday to arrange this vile barter of so much money for one fair body.

"Don't go on," she says hastily; "don't seek to cover your relation with soft words. I prefer it crude and harsh like this: You gain, I lose; I am the victim, you the victor. At least, I should be grateful that you have assigned me the nobler part. You were sure, then, of my acquiescence in this scheme?"

"If you refuse," begins Sir Wilding, misled by the scorn of her manner into believing her bent on rebellion, "I can only say—"

"*How* can I refuse?" cries she, turning upon him with sudden fury. "You have laid a net for me—who shall deliver me from it? *Anything* before dishonor. I give in; do what you will with me—marry me to this man as soon as the barest decency will permit, and let us be done with it."

"There must, of course, be some usual delay," says Sir Wilding, trying vainly to conceal the exultation her words have caused him. "But—"

"I warn you not to give me time to *think*," says Miss Brand, rising sullenly. "I shall marry him in a fortnight, or I shall not marry him at all. Understand that, and make no mistake about it. Tell him so."

"But if—"

"There shall be neither ifs nor buts in this most iniquitous transaction. I am selling my soul for the flimsy thing you call your honor, and you shall certainly undertake all the minor miseries connected with the transfer. Do not

mention my name, but let him fully comprehend that the marriage is to be got over before Christmas."

It is now close upon that holy tide; but, afraid to argue with her in her present mood, Sir Wilding agrees to let George Barrington know that the wedding must be both hurried and, comparatively speaking, private.

As she rises to leave the room, he goes up to her, and lays his hands in a would-be fatherly fashion upon her shoulders.

"I have to thank you," he is beginning sentimentally, but by a sudden movement she shakes herself free of him.

"I have to thank you, too," she says, with passionate bitterness. "This hateful marriage has at least one sweet side to it. It will separate me finally from *you*."

She turns, and, without another glance, sweeps imperiously from the room.

CHAPTER II.

"Moderation is the silken string running through the pearl chain of all virtues."

It is a dull dark day, one of Nature's most barren efforts. The rain is falling in sullen drops, and the wind is moaning heavily. Above, in the cloud-laden sky, the sound of distant storms, in "hollow murmurs, dies away."

A fresh and angry burst of rain is dashing itself against the drawing-room window-panes of Brand House as the servant opens the door and announces "Mr. Barrington."

It is not the old Barrington who is ushered in, but the

young man, his only son. Of the old Barrington it will be sufficient to say that he is "a man of an unbounded stomach" (giving that sentence its most simple meaning) and a very handsome face. Indeed, the Barringtons for generations have been so famed for their beauty that it was considered remarkable when the young man of the present time grew up without even one presentable feature. It earned him the sobriquet of "Ugly Barrington," though there are certainly many men more worthy of the adjective than he.

Yet now, as he enters the room and one looks at him, it must be acknowledged he is an ugly man. But with such a calm earnestness of purpose in his eyes, and with a mouth so characterized by a certain firm sweetness, as serves, in a great measure, to redeem his face from actual plainness, and elevate it into something beyond mere beauty. To many this man is dear; by a few he is well beloved. He is about twenty-nine, and stands a shade less than six feet in height.

He comes quickly up to Florence Brand as the door closes behind him, and says, without any preface,

"Your father tells me there is some hope for me."

"My father told you, no doubt, I was willing to marry you," returns she slowly. Her eyes do not fall before his. On the contrary, they look at him steadily and half defiantly.

"Yes. I could not bring myself to believe in my good fortune, however; so came to hear from your own lips whether it be really so."

"My father spoke the truth"—"*for once,*" is on the tip of her tongue, by an effort she restrains herself; "yet

there is something more that probably he did *not* tell you. I can marry you, indeed, but I can not love you."

"Not yet," says Barrington. "But that is scarcely to be wondered at; you have seen me but four times altogether, I think."

"That is just the number of times you have seen me: and yet—"

"You should remember the difference between us," interrupts he quietly. The manly humility of his tone would probably have touched any woman but one determined to regard him at his worst.

"And yet," she goes on haughtily, as though disdaining the interruption, "you say—at least, my father says—that you love me."

"Your father says less than the truth. That *you* should love *me* on so short an acquaintance is more than I ever hoped."

"Well, I have told you," says Miss Brand, after a slight pause; "I thought so much was due to you."

"It was. But is that *all?*" asks he, regarding her closely.

"Is it not enough?" asks she in turn contemptuously. "Were I you, I should hesitate."

"You are not me; I do not hesitate. I accept the risk," returns he slowly.

"You are a brave man!" she says, with a curl of her beautiful lip.

In this spirit they get married some few weeks later. The ceremony is got over very creditably, not so much as a

tear falling to dim its luster. The bride, according to some, is too self-possessed—almost stoical in her calm; but, according to others, sufficiently pale to carry off any suspicion of want of feeling. The bridegroom, being the inferior article on all such occasions, is little commented upon.

After the wedding-breakfast, Mr. and Mrs. Barrington start for town, on their way to the Continent. Just at the end every one makes way for the father to bestow a last embrace upon his only child; but the only child so evidently shrinks from this public demonstration that a slight awkwardness is the result; and finally her husband carries her off hurriedly to the waiting carriage.

But this unpleasant little episode happened quite three hours ago; and now Florence finds herself in a private sitting-room at the Langham. It is a very pretty room, wonderfully home-like and cozy for an hotel; and Florence, sinking languidly into a deeply cushioned chair, tells herself, with a sigh of thankfulness, that *at last* she is alone!

She had said some little thing to Mr. Barrington shortly after their arrival that had left him no alternative but to relieve her of his presence; and now, letting her face sink into her palm, she gives herself up to thought for the first time for many days.

Recent events attract first the idle workings of the brain. The cold dawn when she had awakened and risen, and gone stolidly about such preparations as must belong to a coming marriage, whether distasteful or otherwise; the drive to church; the wedding; every smallest word uttered by her or *him* (she shudders), every pulsation of her care-

fully subdued heart, now returns to her clearly as when the actual hour was at hand. The breakfast, where *he* (another shudder) had spoken a few quiet words, and where the bishop had been more hopelessly silly than even his worst enemies could have anticipated—*all* comes to her now. All seems clear as "a dream within a dream." Yet everything is reality. In that lies the sting, she tells herself, with a start of anguish. A few short hours ago she was Florence Brand; now she can no longer lay claim to that title. Yet how she had despised it those few short hours ago! and now how willingly would she return to it! She must have been mad!

She has risen to her feet with an impulsive desire to do something that may recall her liberty, but sinks back again into her seat, overpowered by the weight that has been brought to bear upon her. She is irrevocably bound to the man she does not love. She is forever separated from the man she could have loved with all her soul, so she believes. As this cruel certainty comes to her, she does not curse Fate, but she sighs; her lips pale, her eyes enlarge; evidently a struggle is going on within her. Finally, Satan conquers. Drawing a small morocco case from her pocket, she opens it, and gazes eagerly and longingly at its contents.

She has been twenty minutes so occupied, with pauses between (because I contend the most love-lorn damsel could not gaze for so long without intruding thoughts upon the object of her most sacred adoration), when the door opens, and a waiter entering the room puts sentimental regrets to flight.

He throws some coal on the fire with a considerable

amount of noise; and I don't know whether George Barrington is suggestive of coal, but certainly the trimming of that fire suggests to Mrs. Barrington that she has not seen her newly acquired husband for a considerable time.

"Can I do anything for you, ma'am?" asks the waiter, when he has finished making the coals a nuisance.

"No, thank you," says Mrs. Barrington curtly. In reality, she is curious enough to inquire where Mr. Barrington may be, but can not bring herself to ask the question. Then the waiter goes away, and she falls again to contemplating the portrait in the case, and finally dreams away an hour gazing into the glowing fire; yet the absorption that had been hers during that first twenty minutes does not return to her again. Instinctively, though nervously, she feels that she is listening for the opening of the door behind her.

About two hours later, Mr. Barrington, opening this door, comes leisurely into the room. There is no lover-like haste in his footsteps. He walks straight up to where his wife is sitting in her low chair before the fire.

She does not lift her head at his approach, but still stares earnestly into the blazing coals. Who shall say what phantoms she is conjuring up from the caverns and hollows that lie amongst them!

"Florence," says Barrington at length, as though to attract attention.

A tide of color sweeps over her face for an instant, leaving her paler than before.

"Well?" she says, resting her eyes by an effort upon his.

"I am afraid I have roused you from happy thoughts," he says quietly. "But I find it necessary to ask you again where you would like to go."

"I thought Rome was our destination."

"It was. But it shall be home again instead, if you wish it."

"Why should I wish it?" asks she, flashing a sudden glance at him. "There, or at Rome, it will be all the same to me; I shall be as happy in one place as in the other."

"Or as *unhappy!* That is what you mean, of course?"

Seeing she will not answer, he goes on again:

"Be candid with me, at least; I shall never forgive *myself* for having tempted you to this marriage; therefore I can not expect *you* to forgive me. But let there be no polite reservations."

"You can hardly accuse me of hypocrisy so far," she says, rising suddenly, and going nearer to him. The coldness, the half-suppressed aversion she had displayed during his courtship now comes vividly back to her. "Why did you marry me?" she says, lifting her eyes to his.

"For want of a more fashionable reason, let us say I loved you," returns he, in an unmoved tone.

"At least," says Florence, subdued by his earnestness, "I did not deceive you. I told you openly, distinctly, that *I* did not love *you.*"

"You did, indeed. Do not imagine I have forgotten one look or tone of yours on that occasion. And yet I hoped! Some fool has said, 'Hope is the anchor of the

soul.' It has failed me, however. My bark has gone down; has foundered, with all hands on board."

"I warned you," she says, sullenly. "I told you the worst."

"The worst?" His glance is scrutinizing.

"Yes. What could there be worse than the fact that I bore you no affection—*none;* not even the smallest friendliness?"

"There might be far worse," says Barrington, slowly; "there might be, for instance, the fact that you loved another."

The blood recedes from lip and brow; but she does not lower her eyes before his.

"When I asked you to marry me I believed you heart-whole," says Barrington, in the same low even voice he has used all through; "and so believing, I swore to myself I would make you my own, heart and soul, by right of my love, in less than three months. Two hours ago I lost all hope."

"You mean?" she asks, still defiant. She is terribly pale; but her eyes have not fallen. Even at this supreme moment he pauses to cast a thought of admiration upon her undaunted courage.

"I have discovered your love for—*Take care!*" She has swayed a little, and the lace of her sleeve has caught the flame of the light nearest to her. In an instant a blaze shoots up from her rounded arm. With a swift movement Barrington closes his hand upon the burning lace, and so extinguishes it.

"You are not hurt?" he asks, anxiously.

"No.'

"Not even scorched?"

He pushes up the half-burned sleeve as he speaks, and passes his fingers with a light touch over her arm—the soft pretty arm that is his by lawful right. The remembrance that it *is* his comes to him at this moment, but fails to conquer him; he throws it out with a mental sneer, and lets the white arm fall to its owner's side.

"Forget my arm," she says, with determination; "just now you were saying—"

"That Fate had been kind to me."

"Kind?"

"Yes. I can no longer be tricked or befooled. A chance moment has convinced me that though I labored forever to gain your heart the end would only find me a modern Sisyphus."

She has seated herself again, and is now playing with her fan, with her eyes downcast.

"You have gone so far," she says, slowly, "that perhaps you will explain."

"Oh, about that," he says, carelessly; "if it be necessary, yes. Some time after our arrival I was coming in here to ask you—I really forget what now; nothing of any importance, I dare say—when I saw that you were sitting just where you are now, and that you were *crying!* Crying bitterly, as if your heart would break, on the very day of your marriage!"

He pauses. As though she expects his eyes to be on her, she holds herself erect, and flicks her fan to and fro with an air of insolent indifference. Yet she wrongs him. He

keeps his gaze fixed pertinaciously upon the glass door at the further end of the room.

"I crossed the room silently," he goes on presently, "to ask you what—whether—pshaw—if I could be of any use to you; and as I approached I saw—I really beg your pardon for my indiscretion, but I couldn't help it—I saw lying on your lap a portrait of Mervyn. Your tears were wetting it. I hope it isn't spoiled? It was a faultless likeness."

No answer. The fan is moving with greater rapidity; but otherwise Mrs. Barrington might be deaf to all that is being said.

"It occurred to me then, though I am generally a dull fellow, that I might as well go back to where I came from. Any consolation *I* could offer would but add an additional poignancy to your grief."

"Your manner is an insult?" she says, slowly, turning her large eyes fully upon his.

"I assure you, you mistake me," he says, shrugging his shoulders; "the *facts* I relate may be considered an insult to a married woman; but I am not responsible for them. You were so absorbed with your portrait you did not hear me. I withdrew. Could I behave with more delicate tact? At the door, indeed, I looked back; you were kissing the portrait then. Pah! how hot this room is!"

He walks a step or two, and then returns. By this time she has quite recovered her self-possession.

"So you know Mr. Mervyn?" she says, coolly.

"A little. It would take a clever man to really know him. He—it is rather awkward, all things considered—

but he is the one enemy I have on earth. One would wish to be at least on good terms with one's wife's—*friends.*"

"Your enemy!"

It occurs to her as strange, even at this moment, that Randal Mervyn had not mentioned his acquaintance with her husband.

"Well, that sounds rather theatrical. Let us say he objects to my society. Once I found him out in— But that can't matter now. What remains is the certainty that he would do me a bad turn if he could."

"And you him?"

"I really don't know," says George Barrington. "I don't care about soiling my fingers at any time; and at least I could hardly surpass the injury he has done me."

"At least you know all now," she says.

"It is a pity, for both of us, I did not know it sooner."

"If I had told you, you would not have married me?" she says.

At this he stares a little, and then says contemptuously:

"Your affection for him must be great, indeed, if you could give him up for the mere sake of filthy lucre."

"It wasn't that," she says; "and there is no good to be gained by an explanation now. When my declared indifference to you did not induce you to forego your determination to marry me nothing else would."

"There you wrong me," he says, coldly. "I am at least an honest man. I never hanker after my neighbor's goods."

She pales a little at this insult, but says nothing.

"May I ask," says Barrington, presently, "why you did me the honor to marry me?"

"To tell you what you already know would be waste of time."

"I can hardly believe you sacrificed your love and your whole life for the sake of £5000 a year. It isn't good enough."

"You put it wrongly," she says, with some passion, rising in such a violent fashion as pushes the chair on which she has been sitting far from her. "How dare you think that! Were you Crœsus himself I would not have married you but for my father's sake."

"I had no idea your father was so dear to you," retorts he, with a sneer.

"He owed *your* father money; he could not repay it. There was only one way, and I—I was sacrificed. Now that you have made me say what you already know, are you satisfied? Is your revenge complete? It was well arranged between you all."

Then, in a second, her passion dies.

"Why discuss it?" she says, with the old calm listlessness.

"*Your* father owed *mine* money!" repeats he, in a somewhat stunned manner, his face very pale.

"Yes." Then, with a contemptuous smile: "You would have me believe you knew nothing of it?"

"On my soul, I didn't," says Barrington. "All this is a revelation. I can now read between the lines. My poor father! so this is how he sought to secure my happiness. Alas, how difficult a thing it is to meddle with the threads

of life! But *your* father," cries he, fiercely, "what shall be said of him?"

"Anything you like," says Florence, coldly. "The worst you could say would neither pain nor offend me. I have at least done with *him* forever. So much gratitude I owe you."

"Don't overburden yourself," says Barrington, dryly. He pauses for a moment, and considers a little; and then again turns his face to hers. "May I ask you again," he says, "what you now intend doing? Is it to be home, or Italy, or where?"

"Decide for yourself," returns she, curtly.

"I must consider you, too." He says this very gently. "However divided our interests may be, we are, unfortunately, bound to each other until kindly death steps in to do a good turn to one or other of us. In the meantime, the world is bent on supposing us all-sufficient for each other's happiness for some weeks to come;" he laughs rather bitterly as he says this; "therefore to precipitate ourselves again so soon upon the friends we have left behind will only create comment, and make matters even more awkward for us than they are already. Why should we make the world merry at our expense? You follow me?"

She bows her head, but says nothing. She is looking pale and exhausted, and almost incapable of speech.

"Then let us go on to Paris," says Barrington. "It will be dull for you, but we need stay there only a week. When we return to our home you can easily explain that you—that *we;* yes, *we* will be decidedly the best—pined

for a home Christmas, and so we came back sooner than we first intended. Nobody will believe you, I dare say; but at least nobody can prove the lie."

"Yes, it is a good plan," she says heavily, conquering, by a supreme effort, the sense of weakness that is overpowering her.

She rises as she speaks, and stands resting her hand on the back of her chair.

"As for this week you are to put in with me alone," says Barrington, hurriedly, "don't let it distress you. You will dine with me, for the sake of appearances and the prejudices of your maid; but beyond that I promise you shall see me only when you desire my presence."

"I thank you for that, at least," she says, gratefully.

There is a note of passionate relief in her tone. She makes a step forward, with a face the color of death. Then something happens to the walls of the room, she hardly knows what, but she flings out her arms affrightedly, as though to keep them away from her.

"Florence!" cries Barrington, hurrying toward her.

She sways slowly forward, and, but for his arms, would have fallen heavily to the ground.

CHAPTER III.

"I am just going to leap into the dark."

"We take no note of time but from its loss," says Young. To Florence Barrington these seven days in Paris are each one a century in itself, whose death is longed for even as its birth is known. Now, back again in her native

country, she feels the hours no whit less wearisome, and chafes and writhes beneath the yoke that has been laid upon her.

Her husband's coldness and evident avoidance are, of course, matters for which she should feel gratitude; but they, too, gall and harass her in many ways.

She lets her thoughts run with willful directness upon the man she loves, or at least believes she could have loved had things gone smoothly with her, and one day is startled by finding herself face to face with him.

According to some people, Mr. Mervyn is a very nice young man. He certainly *is* nice in the matter of clothes, and feet, and figure; and whatever hair his barber leaves him curls really beautifully. His eyes too are blue as those Italian skies travelers tell such horrid stories about; and altogether he is decidedly handsome. But whether his mind is up to his body is another thing.

When Florence finds him standing in her path with his hat off, he is looking specially handsome, and full of melancholy. He was not, perhaps, quite so melancholy the moment before, but he must love her indeed to grow so despondent the very instant he sees her—or sees that she sees him—it is *almost* the same.

He really does feel some dejection as he gazes at her charming face, and notes how it pales beneath his gaze. She might have been his, he tells himself, had the Fates been propitious. By which he means, if the Fates had endowed her with a liberal income. And now it is all over, and the man he hates most on earth has stolen her from him.

But *is* it all over? he asks himself, as he watches her

changing face, and notes the deep discontent bosomed in her lovely eyes. To work the undoing of his enemy seems to Mr. Mervyn a very pleasing pastime wherewith to while away these dreary winter days.

Hour by hour this thought grows with him, and strengthens into a positive determination, to lower the man who had once lowered him in the esteem of his fellows. It is his sweetest dream by night and day, and after awhile he tells himself, with a fierce glow of delight, that he has succeeded even beyond his utmost expectations. Yet he is hardly aware how far the willful workings of a wayward heart have combined to help his cause.

To Florence his love is but a secondary consideration when compared with her wild longing to escape from a thralldom into which she has been forced. A martyrdom the more terribly degrading in that she believes Barrington to be as indifferent to her as she to him. Mervyn's honeyed words falling on her ear sound to her as so many instruments with which to work out her revenge on the father and husband who have betrayed her; perhaps, indeed, she feels even more strongly the desire to punish the husband —the man who has deliberately wedded and then neglected her. She grasps with a reckless haste at any means held out to her by which she may fly from the coldness and loveless formalities of the life she is now leading.

And so the perishable days come and go, and the dreary silent Christmas creeps past them and the New-year is at hand.

Opening the door of the library, she enters the room quietly, and goes up to where Barrington is sitting. It is

quite ten o'clock, yet there is something about her of wind and fresh chill that suggests the possibility of her having been abroad, even on such a night as this.

It is rainless, truly, but the frost is biting, and the snow is falling softly between earth and heaven.

Barrington, however, expresses neither surprise nor displeasure. Rising courteously, he moves to one side, thus dumbly inviting her to come to the fire.

"I am not cold," she says, with a little deprecating gesture.

"Exercise provides the best warmth, certainly," returns he quietly.

"Yes, I have been out," says Florence.

"A little imprudent, don't you think?" inquires he, knocking the ash off his cigar, and finally throwing the cigar itself (with what appears to her almost a regretful glance) into the fire.

"*What?*" she says sharply.

"Your meeting him in this sort of way, and unattended."

She starts as if shot, but rallies directly, and walks straight up to the fire.

"I didn't know you were your own detective," she says coolly; "but as it is so, I am glad of it. It simplifies matters; and makes it easier for me to tell you why I came here to-night."

She is dressed in the gown she wore at dinner, a filmy white stuff, and her arms are bare. They are perfectly molded arms, and shine now cream-white beneath the glare of the lamps. It occurs to Barrington at this moment that

there would be pleasure in pressing one's lips to such fair sweet flesh, but he laughs grimly to himself as the idea presents itself to his mind.

"After all, my words but expressed a *mental* certainty," he says slowly; "I had nothing to build upon. Do not teach yourself to think more harshly of me than you need. When I saw you had been out, of course I knew— Well, and you have something to tell me, you say?"

"Yes; it is on my mind, and I must get rid of it. This life we are leading—I can stand it no longer!"

"It is dull, certainly," says Mr. Barrington. "One can not blame you for such a speech as that. Even *I* find it insupportable."

"Well, I am going," says Florence recklessly.

"Yes! And with whom?"

"You know; Randal Mervyn," replies she, with a defiant glance. It is a glance, too, so full of weariness, and almost childish anger, that from his soul he pities her.

"I think, perhaps, you might have made a better choice," he says. "But that is your own affair. Existence here, I know, is barren to the last degree, but—how do you propose improving it?"

"*Any* change must be an improvement."

She creeps closer to the fire, as if chilled, and holds out her small hand to the genial warmth. A ray from the fire catching the diamonds in her rings draws her attention to them. Slowly, mechanically, she slips them from her fingers one by one, and lays them on the chimney-piece.

"Oh, pray don't do that," says Barrington. "You will miss them, and they are of no earthly use to me. It seems

to me such a silly thing to make one's self uncomfortable in this sort of way."

"I am happier without them. Of course, I might have gone away without giving you warning," she says, turning her face up to his; "but I knew you would lay no embargo on my going; on the contrary," bitterly, "I knew you would rather rejoice at it."

"Shall I? Well, never mind that now," says Barrington; "leave me out of it altogether. I don't suppose I was every really *in* it. You are going to try life anew with Mervyn, you say?"

"Yes." Her voice is so low and tired that either excitement or passion would be almost impossible to it.

"But—"

"There must be no hinderances," interrupts she doggedly; "my mind is quite made up. If you detain me now, it shall be to-morrow. And if not then, some other time."

"You quite mistake me," says Barrington calmly. "I seek to place no hinderance in your way. Why should I? A prisoner would be to me a most embarrassing possession. Go where you will, *I* shall not seek to detain you. Indeed, I must thank you for your behavior on this occasion; you have spared the idle conjecturing and angry searching that usually accompany this sort of thing. It is really the most comfortably arranged affair of the kind that I have ever known. Well; and when are you going?"

"As soon as possible," she says, puzzled by his careless treatment of what she regards as a tragedy. Is her vengeance, then, to be incomplete?

"It is a serious step. I should take time to consider it

if I were you," says Barrington thoughtfully. "To change from one evil to another can hardly be termed wise."

"It can not at all events be a change for the worse," she says bitterly. "To him at least I am something; to you, nothing."

"Are you so sure of that?"

"Have you ever spoken even one word of love to me? Do you treat me as he does?"

"I dare say not; but the reason for my stupidity is obvious; I never loved—I never thought of love in connection with any one but you. He, I understand, has had considerable experience."

"It is your part to malign him," she says, with cold disdain.

"There you mistake me again. I owe both him and you a debt of gratitude, but no grudge. You are doing me a very good turn, which I acknowledge. By your goodness I shall be enabled to obtain a divorce; and, as the gods can not *always* prove unkind, I dare say some time or other in the future I shall induce some heart to love me."

She makes no answer to this. Something in her face—a vague restlessness—and her determination not to sit down, reduce speculation to certainty with him in a few minutes.

"You are going to meet him again now?" he says, with calm question.

"Yes," defiantly.

"It would be necessary, of course, to make arrange-

ments. You have not told me, I think, when you intend going?"

"To-night, if possible. There is an up-train at midnight."

As she says this, still with the touch of defiance about her, a sigh escapes her. It does *not* escape him.

"But consider the cold. Why not wait until the morning, and go up to town comfortably? Take your own ponies to the station, and your luggage, and that. To be without one's luggage means misery. I would avoid the orthodox secrecy, if I were you, and the usual conventionalities. An affair of this kind must necessarily be vulgar; but, by stripping it of its worn-out trappings, I don't see why you could not make something almost attractive out of it."

"It is kind of you to interest yourself so much," she says sneeringly.

"I have always felt an interest in you." Then suddenly, "You are looking pale and tired. Think of the journey that lies before you; and let me entreat you to take at least a glass of wine before you start."

"No, no!"

"Why not?" He pours out a glass as he speaks, and brings it to her. "There is no reason why you should refuse to take a simple cordial from the hands of the man you swore 'to love and honor;' we will say nothing of the 'obey,' as it would have been my pleasure to turn the tables, and obey *your* slightest whim, had things been different. You are going to betray me to-night; but at least let us part friends."

There is a cynical smile on his lips; but, her head being bent, she is ignorant of it.

"Where do you meet him?" he asks presently.

"At the smaller gate, at the end of the garden."

"He has a conveyance for you?"

"He has a carriage."

"If he is there now you should not delay him. Remember what a severe night it is. New-year's-eve, by the bye. Well, I hope your next year," with a courteous glance, "will be happier than your last."

"You are very kind," she says. "And now, good-bye."

"Not yet. Not here. Let me accompany you as far as the garden-gate."

"*You!*"

"Yes. Why not? I am one of the advanced school of thought; one of those liberal beings who look with leniency upon almost anything. Why should any human thing be unhappy, if it can accomplish an escape from its misery? It is misery to you to be *with* me or *without* Mervyn—I really don't know which. You cry to yourself, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest!' Nature not having endowed you with these useful appendages, you wisely make another way for yourself to escape."

"Why should I take you out at this hour?"

"For no reason, except that I want to go. You see," pointing to the dog-whip beside him, "I was really going out, whether or no, to the kennels. Let me see you to your destination first."

"There is really no necessity," she says, drawing back.

"Perhaps not. But I have a fancy to see the last of you. What! will you refuse this small request of mine, when probably we shall never meet again? Come, let me take you to Mervyn. When with him I shall understand you are in *safe keeping.*" Again the shadow of a smile, replete with sarcastic bitterness, crosses his face.

CHAPTER IV.

"There's neither honesty, manhood, nor good-fellowship in thee."

THE snow has ceased to fall, and a dull moon shines sullenly from between two leaden clouds. It gives sufficient light, however, to let Mervyn, at the wicket-gate, see that two figures are approaching him instead of one. He starts involuntarily, and makes a movement as if to go.

"You needn't run away," says Barrington, the grave ghost of a humorous expression lighting his eyes.

Thus openly addressed, Mervyn perforce comes to a standstill, though the desire for flight is undeniably written upon his brow.

Florence, glancing nervously from one man to the other, tells herself at this moment there is a mental beauty that far outdoes the merely physical.

"I know all about it," says the ugly man imperturbably. "Mrs. Barrington, having found life with me insupportable, is desirous of trying it with you. I think myself she shows bad taste; but that is so natural a conceit that I dare say you will excuse it. She tells me you intend to travel. Continuous change is always to be desired on

such occasions; but I hope you will be able to make her happy. She is extravagant in some ways. I like an extravagant woman myself," says Barrington, pleasantly. "But it doesn't suit all purses."

"I don't understand you," says Mervyn, with a miserable attempt at haughtiness.

"Then I must try to make my meaning clearer. Look here," says Barrington, changing his tone suddenly, and turning sharply upon the other, "let us drop hints, and come to business. You are in debt, as I *know*; you are on the point of absolute ruin, as I *suspect*. In six months you will not have enough money to keep yourself going, to say nothing of another. I give you a chance of beginning a new life elsewhere. If you will leave this place *alone* to-morrow I will give you £5000."

The crisp clear voice ceases, and silence follows it. Mrs. Barrington, throwing back her hood from her face, stares with passionate impatience at the man in whose love she had believed a minute ago. Will he *never* speak? Is there to be a hesitation, a choice, between *her* and a paltry sum of money?

"If I thought," he stammers at last lamely, "that it would be for *her* happiness to leave her in peace, I—"

"If you are about to make any allusion to Mrs. Barrington, I must beg you to leave it unsaid," interrupts Mrs. Barrington's husband unpleasantly. "Come to the point. You will take the money, and be gone?"

There is another silence, even more distressing than the last. Florence, immovable as a statue, stands erect; Barrington is beating his foot angrily on the ground. As for

Mervyn;—he *is* ruined—there was no exaggeration in that suspicion—and the money is a temptation, and—

"Well, considering all I am giving up—" he begins, too confused, perhaps, to comprehend the enormity of his words.

"There, don't be a greater blackguard than is strictly necessary," says George Barrington, cutting him short with a frown. "You accept my terms? That is well. To-morrow morning you shall have my check, and now—you shall have *this!*"

In a second he has twined his hand in Mervyn's collar, and brought him on his knees before him. Raising the dog-whip, he brings it down with uncontrollable fury upon his shoulders again and again, until the miserable craven cries aloud for mercy, groveling at the very feet of the woman to whom he had been half a hero at least, an hour agone. With a final cut, Barrington flings him far from him, and, taking Florence's hand with impulsive haste, hurries her toward the house until they are out of sight and hearing of the frightened wretch they have left behind.

Then, the fierce fit of passion and revenge over, Barrington stops and breathes heavily. The livid pallor departs from his lips, the baleful fire from his eyes; he even smiles.

Florence, terrified, breaks into bitter weeping.

"Come home, you little silly fool," says Ugly Barrington, not altogether unkindly; and then he actually laughs aloud, as he may who wins. But presently, seeing how she sobs and trembles, he goes nearer to her, and finally places his arm round her.

But she shrinks from him.

"I wonder you can bear to touch me," she says, shivering. "I suppose, after this, my best place is with my father."

"Your best place is with your husband," says George Barrington, "if you will only trust him."

"Oh, George, that word *trust* undoes me quite! How can *you* trust *me?*"

"I would trust you with my life—nay, with far more, my honor—this very moment," says Barrington, simply, "in spite of all that has come and gone. A woman who found a difficulty in running away from her husband, without first apprising him of her intention, can't have much the matter with her. Let us forget to-night. It is known but to that cur and you and me; and he, I fancy, will be slow to speak of it."

"But you will *think* of it."

"Not I; or even if I do, it will be only to laud myself afresh for my clever treatment of a grievous evil. I unmasked a villain just at the right moment, and before the necessary witness."

"If you had treated me differently just at first—had shown me that you loved me—"

"Nay, then I should have been a clumsy fool, and have lost my game. Now I breathe the air of heaven with renewed lungs, and hope again there is still a chance to win your love."

"'Hope, that some *fool* has called the anchor of the soul,'" murmurs she, copying the tone and words he had used on the evening of their marriage to a nicety. He smiles, and she smiles, too, because youth is warm within

her, and it is so hard to be *always* sighing. Still, the smile is followed by a sigh.

But the ice being slightly broken he bends down to her, and kisses her warmly.

"That is the first real kiss I have ever dared to give you," he says, his plain face lighting up until it is nearly handsome. "Now I begin to woo you in earnest. And there is one thing, sweetheart: let no sense of mistaken gratitude, of revulsion of feeling, induce you to *fancy* you love me until you really do. Let me be your suitor for the present."

She makes him no answer to this. They have regained the house now; entering the hall, a glow of warmth smites on their hands and faces.

"At least tell me," he says, looking into her nervous eyes, "that you find it pleasanter returning to a warm fire than to be hurrying, on such a night as this, through sleet and snow."

She shudders.

"What have you not saved me from!" she says. She half puts out her hand, as though to touch him, and then timidly draws it back again.

"Now, I will have none of that," he says, in his masterful but tender fashion, taking her hand and laying it upon his heart.

"There is one thing," she says, with downcast lids. "Since our marriage, though I have not kissed *you*, I have at least kissed no one else." She blushes excessively as she says this, but she lifts her head and looks him very fairly in the eyes. He draws his breath quickly.

"I thank you for that," he says; and then more lightly, "after all, I believe your liking for him was more fancy than anything else."

"And obstinacy," confesses she, in a low tone. "My father was so averse to him; and besides, he used to say sweet words to me when all the world seemed unkind."

"And when *I*, who should have protected you, was silent and reserved. The blame must rest with me, for I was the better man of the two," says Barrington boldly, "and should have found victory easy. After all," quaintly, "there are other things as worthy of commendation as a Grecian nose."

"Ah! what is that?" exclaims she, starting violently. Even as she speaks the sound of the calm, sweet, solemn bells ringing in the New-year is borne to them upon the wings of the rushing wind.

"It is another year begun," says Barrington, gravely. "Let us pray that in it may be found happiness for us!"

THE END.

BETTY'S VISIONS.

By RHODA BROUGHTON.

HER FIRST VISION.

"I CAN see nothing *unnatural* about her!" says the mother, with an aggrieved accent on the adjective. "She is a remarkably nice child, if that is unnatural. Every one says she is a remarkably nice child, every one but you."

"Did I say that she was not a remarkably nice child?" retorts he, nettled; "should I be likely to say that my own child was not a nice child?"

"You said that she was *unnatural*, what more could you have said of her if she had had two heads?"

"How you harp upon a mere word!" replies he, crossly; "if I said *unnatural*, I only meant that she was not like other children."

"If, as I incline to think, since Rachel's arrival, to be like other children means to be voracious, idle, and uncivil, I am not sorry she is unlike other children."

Perhaps because he feels that he is getting the worst of it, Mr. Brewster declines into silence, and walking to the window, stands there, whistling subduedly, and watching the object of dispute and her cousin Rachel, both at pres-

ent visible upon the lawn. But, though they are both in the same place, their occupations are dissimilar. Rachel, seated in the fork of the mulberry-tree, to which she had hoydenishly climbed, is gnawing an unripe apple, rudely snatched, half-eaten, from one of the boys; while little Betty, the daughter of the house, is soberly walking over the sward beside a stout, middle-aged gentleman, one of whose hands she is quietly caressing with both hers.

"Uncommonly fond little miss of her uncle!" resumed Mr. Brewster, presently, in a not very complacent tone; "I never heard of any child being so fond of an uncle. I am sure I was not when I was a boy. I remember one of mine giving me a precious good licking because I filled his top-boots with cold water!"

"And richly you deserved it!" retorts his wife.

"But as to Miss Betty," continued he.

"*Miss Betty* is a very amiable child," interrupts Mrs. Brewster, with a not altogether amiable accent on her daughter's name.

"I never said she was not," rejoins he, with a testiness born of the implied slur upon the amiability of his own infancy. "All I say is that there is something un—"

Natural, he is going to add; but, bethinking himself in time how gravely displeasing the expression is to his wife, he pulls himself up. Perhaps she is grateful to him for his self-control. Perhaps the various little shafts she has winged at him have eased her spleen, for she says presently, in a far better humored voice—

"She *is* uncommonly fond of him; of course he is a very good fellow, being your brother" (with a little mali-

cious laugh); "how could he help being? But I confess I can not see his attraction. I really do not know," she adds, thoughtfully, "how I shall break to the child that he is going on Tuesday."

"Whatever you do, do not put it off till the last moment," says he, hastily, "or we shall be having a scene."

"She never makes scenes," replies Mrs. Brewster, coldly.

"I wish she did; she would not feel things so deeply if she made scenes."

"Well, as he is only going for a fortnight to Maidenhead," returns Betty's father, with a short laugh, "in my humble opinion it will be rather a waste of deep feeling in this case; it is like the parson who preached from the text, 'Knowing well that they should see his face no more,' and took an affecting farewell of his congregation when he was only going by a penny boat down to Margate."

"You must remember that to a child a fortnight is as long as two years would be to old people like you and me," replies his wife, passing by with grave contempt the dubious facetiousness of her husband's illustration; and as she speaks she leaves the room.

The dreaded Tuesday has come. The carriage that bears away the beloved Uncle John has driven from the door. The whole family—gathered to bid him God-speed on the door-step—have again dispersed to their various avocations. Rachel, having pumped up a few noisy and unnecessary tears—tears speedily dried by half a dozen cobnuts thrust into her hand by the warmest-hearted of the boys—has gone off rabbiting with the latter, forgetful and

elate; a bag of ferrets in her lily hand. Betty, who, on the contrary, has not cried at all, remains rooted to the door-step, silent and still; her eyes fastened to the spot where the departing vehicle had last blessed her sight.

"Why, in Heaven's name, if she is so cut up, can not she cry?" says Mr. Brewster to his wife, as they saunter away together toward the garden. "If Rachel or the boys are in trouble, one can not hear one's self speak for the noise of their sorrow; I do not care what you say, there is something unna—"

The forbidden word dies half spoken on his lips.

"She will get over it," replies the mother, throwing back a compassionate look at the disconsolate little figure still rooted to the door-step; "she will outgrow it. I believe that I was a very odd child, and you must own "—(laughing)—"that there is nothing very odd about me now."

Five days have passed. "July," as Horace Walpole said, "has set in with its usual severity." After a brief spell of tantalizing sunshine, just to show what weather can and ought to be, ——shire has relapsed into its normal state of drip, drip. It has poured all day. All day the rooms have rung with the din of the bored and house-bound children. From the school-room have issued noisome smells of amateur cooking; squeals as of a pinched Rachel; yells, as of retaliated-upon boys; yelps of trodden-on dogs; Bob's voice; Bill's voice; Geoffrey's voice; highest, shrillest of all, Rachel's voice. But among all the voices, there is not to be detected one tone of little Betty's. She is not even with them; is not even playing her usual

part of meek *souffre douleur*. All through the rainy day she has sat alone in a disused attic, often haunted by her, sat among old trunks and family pictures that have had their day, and now live with their pale faces to the wall; has sat watching those cunning mathematicians, the spiders, spin their nice webs; and the little nervous mice dart noiselessly in and out of their wainscot homes. It has grown dark now; too dark, one would think, even for the spikers to see to weave their webs, but perhaps they do not need sight. Perhaps they go on weaving, weaving all through the night. Mrs. Brewster is sitting in her boudoir. Her husband is dining out, and she is alone. It is not an evening on which one would choose to be alone; an evening on which the wet tree boughs slap the window, and the rain comes sometimes even down the chimney; making the fire spit and fizz. It is the sort of evening on which, looking out into the straining dusk, one might expect to see a Banshee's weird face pressed against the pane. Some such nervous thought as this has prompted Mrs. Brewster to stretch out her hand to the bell, to ring for the servant to draw the curtains, when the door noiselessly opens, and her little daughter enters.

"Betty!" cries the mother, in a cross tone, for there is something ghostly and that harmonizes with her vague fears, in the child's soundless mode of entry, "not in bed yet? It is nine o'clock! What do you mean?"

Betty makes no answer. She has silently advanced out of the shadows that enwrap the further end of the room, into the little radius of red light diffused by the wood fire.

"What is the matter with you? Why do you not speak?" cries Mrs. Brewster, irritably. The child is beside her now, and her eyes are lifted to her mother's; and yet the latter feels that they are somehow not looking at her, but, as it were, at some object beyond her.

"What is the matter with you?" repeats she, with growing nervous ill-humor, shaking the little girl by the shoulder.

Then Betty speaks. "Uncle John is dead!" she says, in a level, dreaming voice. "I know it; he touched me on the shoulder as he passed by."

"What nonsense are you talking?" cries Mrs. Brewster, angrily. "How can Uncle John have touched you when he is a hundred and twenty miles away? What do you mean by telling such a silly falsehood?"

The child does not answer. She neither retracts nor reasserts her statement. She only stands perfectly still, with that odd, unseeing look in her eyes.

"If you do not know how to behave more rationally you had better go to bed," says the mother, displeased and frightened—she scarcely knows at what—and noiselessly and still, as if in a dream, Betty obeys.

The morning has come, and it and the sunshine it has brought with it, have dispersed and routed the eerie terrors of the night.

Sitting in her light and cheerful boudoir, Mrs. Brewster has forgotten with how creepy a feeling she had looked into its dark corners over night. She has forgotten also Betty's strange speech, and her own ire at it. She is smiling to herself at the recollection of some little whimsical

incident of his dinner-party, retailed to her by her husband, when that husband enters.

"A telegram?" says she, seeing a flimsy pink paper in his hand. "From whom? No bad news, I hope?" She says it without violent emotion, all that the world holds of great importance to her being safely housed within the same walls as she.

Mr. Brewster does not answer.

"From John, I suppose?" suggests she, calmly. "He is coming back sooner than he intended."

Then, surprised at his silence and looking up for the first time into his face—

"Good heavens, what is it?"

For all answer he puts the paper into her hand, and her eye in an instant has drunk its contents. "From Mr. Smith, Skindle's Hotel, Maidenhead. To Mr. Brewster, Taplington Grande, ——shire. Accident on the river last night. Colonel Brewster drowned. Body just recovered. Come at once."

Mrs. Brewster has turned very pale; but at such news a change of color is not surprising.

"Last night!" she says, Betty's speech flashing suddenly back upon her mind.

"What time last night? It does not say what time."

"What does the exact time matter?" replies he, gruffly; turning away his head with an Englishman's unconquerable aversion from being seen, even by a wife, under the influence of any emotion. He had liked his brother; and is thinking of the time when they were little boys together.

"It does matter!" she cries, excitedly. "It does! it does!"

But he has left the room to give hasty directions relative to his departure, which immediately follows. On the next day he returns, bringing with him his brother's body, and such details of the catastrophe that had caused that brother's death, as are ever likely to be arrived at. Upon that ill-starred evening, the weather at Maidenhead, unlike that in ——shire, had been fine, and Colonel Brewster had, according to his frequent habit after dinner, taken a boat and sculled himself on the river. He had not returned at his usual hour, which excited some slight surprise at the hotel, but not much alarm was felt until early on the ensuing morning, when his hat was brought in by a countryman, who had found it near the bank of the river, and had also seen a skiff floating, keel uppermost, further out in the stream. Drags were immediately procured, and after half an hour's search the body was discovered half a mile lower down the river in a bed of rushes. By what accident the boat had capsized, and its occupant, an excellent swimmer, lost his life, will probably never be known. Only the fact remains, that on the evening of his death his niece, at the distance of one hundred and twenty miles away, had become aware of its having taken place. She expressed no surprise at the news, nor ever revealed, further than by that once sentence, how she had become apprised of it. This was her First Vision.

HER SECOND VISION.

TIME has been galloping away. It has begun to gallop even with Betty; for she is grown up. At eighteen, time gallops, though not violently; at thirty-eight, it outstrips an express train; and at fifty-eight it leaves the electric telegraph behind it. Betty is eighteen, and full-grown. No longer is she measured, with heels together and chin tucked in, against the school-room door; since, for the last year, she has continued stationary at that final inch in the paint which proclaims that her height is to remain at five feet five inches, until, that is, the epoch, which arrives sooner than we expect it, when she will begin to grow down again. She has developed into a demure, pale comeliness; and no one any longer thinks her odd. Her father no longer considers her as unnatural; and his altercations with her mother on the subject of her (Betty's) eccentricities have long died into silence. At eighteen, there is nothing eccentric in being indifferent to dolls, and averse from ferrets; in speaking with a soft voice, and liking rather to walk than to run, in seeking solitude, and being able to look at a loaded apple-tree without any desire to swarm up it. With the good word of many, and the ill word of few, Betty takes her still course along life's path; a little thrown into the shade, perhaps, by her cousin Rachel, who has shot up into a very fine young woman—a splendid young female athlete, whose achievements in hunting-field, or on frozen river, in ball-room, or on tennis-ground, are admired by all the country-side, and in the

wake of whose glories Betty follows with distant, unenvying humility.

It is a winter evening, crisp and stilly cold, and in the once school-room, now elevated and transmogrified by the aid of a clean paper and a few girlish gimcracks into a grown-up sitting-room, are the cousins. They are standing side by side at the window, having pulled back the curtain, and are looking out, as well as the hard frost-flowers on the pane will let them, at the moon-ennobled snow.

"You will have a moon!" says Betty.

"At this time to-morrow, as nearly as possible, I shall be getting there," rejoins Rachel, with a sort of dance in her voice. "I wish they had asked you too."

"I do not think that I do," says Betty, reflectively; letting her finger travel slowly down the window, in the effort —a vain one, since they are on the other side of the glass —to reach the airy frost traceries. "I do not think that I enjoy things much at first hand. When you come back and describe them they sound entrancing!"

"I do not see how this visit can help being entrancing!" cries Rachel, pursuing her own joyous anticipations.

"And yet visits do help it," answers Betty, with gentle cynicism.

"Two balls and a play! Skating if it freezes; hunting if it thaws!" continues Rachel, triumphantly; checking off on her fingers her promised pleasures. "I can not think why they did not ask you!"

"I can," replies Betty, with a grave smile, "since they could get the plums without the dough, they were quite wise to do so; but" (with a change of tone to a wistful in-

tonation) "however delightful they may be, you will come home for Christmas?"

"By the number of times you have asked me that question it is evident that you think I shall not," answers Rachel, with a good-humored impatience.

"There is nobody cheers up mother in the way you do," pursues Betty, leaning her elbow on the sill and looking pensively out at the steely December stars. "If one wanted a proof, which one does not, of what a melancholy world this is, one would have it in the fact of the extreme gratitude that people feel for mere animal spirits in any one."

"Mere animal spirits!" repeats Rachel, laughing lightly; "thank you for the compliment."

"I really do not know how I shall break it to the boys if you do not come back for the Workhouse tea and the servants' ball," says Betty, gravely.

"But I shall! I shall! I shall!" cries the other, resolutely; "dead or alive you will see me back on Christmas-eve!" She repeats the assertion emphatically at her departure next day, leaning a radiant face out of the brougham window to blow kisses to the three grave persons assembled on the door-step, and to bid her God-speed, as they and she had assembled to bid Uncle John God-speed some seven years ago.

"She will have a moon," says Betty, following with her serious, youthful eyes the carriage as it rolls briskly away.

"She ought to be there in a couple of hours. It is not more than eighteen miles, and the roads are good. Gad! it is cold!" says Mr. Brewster, rubbing his hands and turning to re-enter the house, whither his wife has already pre-

ceded him, and resumed her occupation of that sofa where, from some real or imagined sickness, she now spends the major part of her life. There, some good while later, her husband finds her stretched, discomposed and fretful. Her work is disarranged; her silks are mixed; she can not sort the colors by candle-light; Rachel always managed them for her.

"She must be nearly at Hinton now," says Mr. Brewster, intermitting for a moment his back-warming process to glance at the clock on the chimney-piece behind him, and glad of a topic by which to divert the current of his wife's plaints; "the roads are good, and there is a moon as big as a cart-wheel. I am glad I did not let her have the young horses, as she wanted," pursues he, in a self-congratulatory tone; "they take a great deal of driving."

"I can not think what I am to do without her for a whole week," sighs Mrs. Brewster, pettishly. "Who is to tell whether this is blue or green?" sitting up and helplessly comparing two skeins of filosel by the light of the shaded lamp that stands beside her couch. "Where is Betty? She would be better than nobody. I do not know how it is," with a distinct access of fractiousness, "but that girl always manages to be out of the way whenever one wants her."

"Talk of the devil," cries her father, cheerfully; "here she is." And in effect, as he speaks, his daughter enters, and moves slowly to the fire.

"Your eyes are better than mine, Betty," says the mother, holding out her dubious silks for her child's inspection; then suddenly, as she lifts her look to the girl's

face, changing her tone, "what is the matter with you?" she asks, abruptly; "how odd you look!"

Betty has paused beside her mother's sofa; and her eyes, wide open, yet unseeing as those of a somnambulist, are fixed unthinkingly upon her.

"Rachel is dead," she says, in a distinct, level, passionless voice, as of one speaking in a dream. "I know it! She touched me on the knee as she went by."

Mr. Brewster has dropped his coat tails, and Mrs. Brewster her silks, and both are staring open-mouthed, aghast, and dumb at their daughter. Mr. Brewster is the first to recover his speech.

"What gibberish are you talking?" cries he, roughly; putting his hand on the girl's wrist. "Are you walking in your sleep? Wake up!"

But Betty makes no answer. She turns slowly, as one who has accomplished her errand, and walks as dreamily out of the room as she had entered it.

Mrs. Brewster has tottered up from her sofa, trembling like a leaf, and crying copiously.

"How can you pay any heed to such rubbish?" asks her husband, angrily. "The girl is hysterical. She would be all the better for having a bucket of cold water thrown over her. We have always let her have her own way too much, that is it."

But Mrs. Brewster is sobbing violently.

"Do you not remember?" she cries. "It was just the same, she said just the same years ago, when she was a child, when John died."

"Fiddlesticks!" says he, in a fury. "Who would have

expected a woman of your sense to be so puerilely superstitious? A mere coincidence. Rachel dead! Ha! ha! She must have been pretty quick about it. Come now, think" —(laying his hand friendly and reasonably upon her trembling shoulder)—" what is likely to have happened to her in less than two hours? If she had had the young horses, I grant you, it would have been a different thing, but as it is—there, that is better. Let me get you some sal-volatile, and when next I see Miss Betty I will give her a piece of my mind for upsetting you in this way."

Mr. Brewster's eloquence, though not of a very lofty order, is yet of sufficient force gradually to soothe his wife into comparative composure, and, when to his reasonings he has added the promise, given with a good-humored shrug, that a servant on horseback shall be sent off first thing in the morning to inquire after Rachel's welfare, the poor lady is so far restored to her normal state of faint and intermittent cheerfulness, that she is able to sit down to dinner with tolerable appetite. Betty does not appear; which, though neither of her parents confess it, is a relief to both. Mr. Brewster is not generally much given to table-talk. Being of a hungry and slightly epicure turn, he is of opinion that it is impossible to do two things well at once, but to-day he puts forth his powers magnanimously to amuse his wife; and the ball of talk is flying briskly from one to the other, when the butler, approaching his master, and even so far breaking through the traditions of his trade as to interrupt him in the middle of a speech, informs him in an undertone " that there is a person in the hall who wishes to speak to him."

"Let him wish!" says Mr. Brewster, somewhat surly at having the thread of his eloquence untimely snapped. "Did not you tell him I was at dinner? He may wait."

"If you please, sir, he says he must see you," rejoins the butler, with respectful persistence. "I beg your pardon, sir" (lowering his voice still further, and looking meaningly toward Mrs. Brewster, whose attention is at the moment wholly occupied by the feeding of a couple of cats), "but I think you had better see him."

There is something so odd and emphatic in the servant's manner, that, without offering any further objection, Mr. Brewster jumps up and hastens into the adjoining hall. There seem to be several persons in it; maid-servants whimpering with their aprons to their eyes; but the center of interest is obviously a young man, leaning with shaking limbs and a sheet-white face, against the oak table in the middle of the hall. Instantly, Mr. Brewster has recognized him as one of the sons of the house to which his niece had gone. In a moment he is beside him.

"What is it?" he says, hoarsely. Then, as the young fellow struggles in vain for utterance, "What is it?" he repeats, shaking him by the shoulder. "In God's name, speak out!"

Perhaps there is a bracing power in the harshness of his adjuration, for the stranger speaks.

"There—there has been an accident," he says, indistinctly. "Your—your niece—"

"Yes?"

"She—she—"

Again he stops, looking as if he were about to faint.

"For God's sake, go on!" says Mr. Brewster, hoarsely. "Harris, give him some brandy."

It is not until he has swallowed it that the young man is able to proceed.

"At the corner of Hampton Lane, in a field, there was a rick on fire. The horses took fright, bolted, and upset the carriage into the ditch. Miss Brewster was thrown off."

"*Thrown off!* What do you mean? Why, she was inside!"

"She was driving. She had put the men-servants inside. She and her maid were on the box. She was thrown violently against some spiked iron railings, and when she was taken up she was—"

"Dead?" asks Mr. Brewster, gripping the young man's arm and speaking in a husky whisper. "Dead?"

The attention of every one in the room has been so wholly riveted upon the speakers, that no one has perceived the opening of the dining-room door and the appearance of a figure on the threshold, until a terrible loud hysteric laugh breaks upon their ears.

"Dead?" shrieks Mrs. Brewster. "Dead? Then it was true; then Betty was right." And so falls heavily to the floor in a dead swoon.

HER THIRD VISION.

THE blow does not kill Mrs. Brewster. Her acquaintances are all agreed that it must, since for years past their and her doctor has gone about the neighborhood proclaiming the unparalleled weakness of her heart. But apparently it is not so weak as he had imagined, since, after such a shock, it still goes on pulsing, however feebly. Weakly people, with one leg habitually planted in the grave, take a great deal of killing; but the catastrophe turns her at once into a hopeless invalid. After that day she never resumes the habits of health. But as time goes on her valetudinarian ways assume a permanence and stability with which those about her as little connect the idea of change and death as with their own robuster modes of life. Never to appear till one o'clock in the afternoon, never to join her family at dinner, never to be seen except in a recumbent posture, never to be told anything disagreeable. These are the features of her case; features which may probably remain long after many of the healthy persons who come to visit her, and who insensibly sink and soften their voices on entering her dim and shaded room, have been carried, feet foremost, to the church-yard. It need hardly be said that no allusion either to her niece's violent death, or her daughter's strange prevision of it is ever allowed in Mrs. Brewster's presence. And though no doctor has prohibited the communicating of any number of disagreeable truths to Mr. Brewster, yet neither does he

ever allude to the facts above referred to. To whom should he, indeed? To Betty, then? But as to Betty, both her lips are shut in a silence as close as that of death. On being told of her cousin's tragic end, she had expressed no more surprise than she had manifested seven years before, on hearing of the death by drowning, of her uncle John. Not the slightest hint as to the mode in which the catastrophe had been communicated to her has ever fallen from her. It is even a matter of doubt to her father whether any consciousness or remembrance of it remains with her. Sometimes, as he sees her seated tranquilly working or quietly reading, with as humdrum and every-day an air as it is possible for any human being to be dressed in, a poignant desire assails him to question her as to those strange and supernatural intimations, of which she has twice been the recipient. But always a sort of reluctant awe restrains him. And meanwhile, life flows dully by in the old house. The boys are out in the world, and return but seldom to the house whence their bright playfellow has been borne to the grave. There is nothing to amuse them when they do return, since the state of Mrs. Brewster's health precludes (or she thinks so, which comes to the same thing) the possibility of society. Betty has quietly abandoned the world at eighteen, in order to devote herself more completely to her parents. To speak more exactly, to her parent; for Mr. Brewster is of a social turn, and would fain take his daughter into the world with him, making her an excuse for his own presence at festivities abroad and merry-makings at home. But how can he have the inhumanity to set up his coarse and brutal claims against those

far more sacred ones of his moribund wife? He is fond of music; but, since Rachel's fingers were stiffened in death, no one has dared to open the piano; the least hint of such an intention would replunge the sickly wife and mother into those terrible hysterics, from which it is the main end of life with her nearest kin to keep her and themselves. And so, poor, convivial Mr. Brewster, except when some one charitably asks him out to dinner, nods through the dull evenings over his newspaper, or tries to feign an interest he is far from feeling in the game of patience which is the one excitement of his good lady's life. In complete unconsciousness, that good lady pursues her gentle way, quietly and simply accepting the sacrifice of the two lives daily offered on her invalid altar, and, with equal simplicity, the owners of those two lives unite in the cult of sanctified selfishness embodied in the charmingly dressed, diaphanous, prostrate being who has succeeded in delicately snuffing out all the mirth of their existence. It is three years since Rachel died, or, to speak more exactly, three years and a quarter, for it was in the deepest, blackest depth of winter that she went, and now the long-stretching light, the bold crocus rows, the courting thrushes, all tell that spring has come.

Betty is twenty-one years old, for it was in the spring that she came, a spring gift blown in by the bustling March winds.

"Twenty-one! twenty-one!" she says over to herself. It seems to her a great age. She wonders whether it strikes other people in the same light.

"Father!" she says, putting her arms about his neck as

he sits running his eye rather disconsolately over the theatrical announcements in "The Times," "Do you know what an elderly daughter you have got? I am twenty-one to-day!"

"Twenty-one?" repeats he, with a jump. "You do not say so. God bless my soul!"

He sighs heavily, but, trying to turn it off into a cough, cries cheerfully:

"Well, I am to give you a present, I suppose. Is that what it means? Well, what is it to be? A new gown—a necklace—what?"

But Betty shakes her head.

"I never wear out my old gowns, and who would see my necklace?"

"What do you say to a little outing?" asks he.

He says it in a low voice, as if he knew that it was a proposition of a contraband nature, and nervously glances over his shoulder as he makes it.

"A little jaunt—quite a little one. It is so long since you and I have had a jaunt together, Betty."

But again Betty shakes her head.

"Impossible!" she says, reproachfully; and yet a little regretfully, too. "How could mother spare us?"

"Not for long, of course," rejoins he, hastily, "but just a run up to London for a couple of nights. We might be there and back almost before she had time to miss us; just a run up to see a play."

"It is a long time" (rather ruefully) "since I have seen a play," says Betty.

She is leaning over his chair, her arms round his

neck, and is reading the theatrical announcements with him.

"Lyceum, Strand, Vaudeville," she says, with a little sigh, that shows that she, too, is nibbling at the temptation. "How nice they all look!"

"We will do a couple of plays, Betty!" cries her father, audaciously, and in a higher key than he has yet spoken in. "I see that they are giving that old piece, 'The First Night,' at the Court. It was the first play I ever saw. My father took me to it when I was quite a little chap. Horace Wigan played in it. You do not remember Horace Wigan? No! Why should we not go to-morrow, eh?"

His daughter has put up her hand apprehensively to check him.

"Hush!" she says, hurriedly; "here is mother!" And in effect, as she speaks, the folding-doors have been thrown open; and, as always happens at this hour of the day, Mrs. Brewster is wheeled slowly in on a couch out of her bedroom; Mrs. Brewster, prostrate, transparent, suffering, as usual. In a moment the husband's voice has sunk to a subdued invalid pitch:

"How are you to-day, dear?" he asks, hastening to his wife's side, and kindly taking her languid hand, "any better?"

"I shall never be better in this world," replies she, exhilaratingly; "but" (her sick eyes wandering suspiciously from one to the other of her two companions) "what is it that I am not to hear, Betty? Why did you say 'hush'?"

There is a moment of confused silence, uneasily broken

by Mr. Brewster. "Betty has been telling me that she is twenty-one to-day."

"She could hardly object to my hearing that," replies her mother, dryly. "Come, Betty, what was it?"

"It was only that father was talking nonsense; you know that he does sometimes," replies the girl, with a little constrained laugh, kneeling down beside her mother's sofa, and raising her thin fingers.

"I am not at all sure that it was such nonsense, after all!" says he, speaking in a rather blustering voice, which his daughter knows to conceal much inward misgiving.

"I—I—was only proposing to—to—take her for a little outing, you see" (after a pause, as his proposition is received in entire silence), "you see" (growing nervous), "she—she has not a very lively time of it—for a girl mewed up with us two old people."

Still silence. At last, "I am sorry that you are so dull, Betty," says the invalid, in a wounded voice, withdrawing her hand. "Why did you not tell me so before?" But at this, poor Betty collapses into sobs.

"Good God!" cries Mr. Brewster, starting up and stamping about the room for a moment, forgetful of the sanctity of the spot. "I mean, bless me, Maria, my dear, what has the poor girl done?" Maria's answer is what the answer of any invalid who respects herself must inevitably be, a sinking flat back on her pillows, with hands and feet grown suddenly rigid, in a faint, so admirably counterfeited, as to take in even herself. Mr. Brewster is quietly, and perhaps a little compassionately, hustled out of the room by his daughter, and thus in disastrous ignominy his

bold project ends. And yet—such are the tides in the affairs of men—on that very day week he is buying "Worlds," and "Truths," and "Queens" for Betty at the station, to beguile their joint journey up to London, for that very outing upon which Mrs. Brewster would seem to have put so complete an extinguisher. And, stranger still, it is Mrs. Brewster herself who sends them. Whether it is the sight of her patient daughter, or of the clumsy, yet most genuinely remorseful husband, or some pinch of her own not dead but only slumbering conscience that effects the change, is of little moment. Certain it is that it is effected.

"What day do you set off?" she asks, suddenly, one evening, as she lies with her eyes fixed on her daughter's face; that unjoyous young face, which is bent with untiring gentleness over that piece of work of her mother's which is eternally needing to be set right.

"Set off?" repeats Betty, lifting her head, and looking apprehensive and a little guilty. "Where to?"

"That is what you can tell me better than I can tell you," replies the mother, dryly, with a faint shade of resentment still lingering against her will in her tone. "Your father was anything but explicit; he spoke of 'an outing;' that might mean Kamschatka or Kew."

"He—he was talking nonsense!" replies Betty, red and stammering.

"No, he was not," rejoins the mother, calmly; "but I was taken so ill—if you remember, it was on the day that I was taken so ill—that he had not time to explain."

This sincere attempt to displace her husband's unlucky suggestion and her own seizure from their natural relation

as cause and effect, an attempt which, as she knows in her own heart, takes in neither herself nor her daughter, brings a weak pink flush into the sick woman's cheek.

"He was talking nonsense!" repeats Betty, murmuringly; "men often do," she adds, with an audacious and illiberal generality.

"What he said was quite true," rejoins Mrs. Brewster, reflectively; "it is a cruelly dull life for a young thing like you."

"But I am not young!" cries Betty, eagerly; "I am old, old! If you only knew how old I feel inside."

"Well, if you do, I do not!" says Mrs. Brewster, with a sort of tremulous playfulness. "To tell you the truth, I think we have been mewing ourselves up a great deal too much of late; that we should be all the better for having a little air from the outer world let in upon us; in short" (laughing nervously), "I have half a mind to join in your outing myself."

"Oh, if you could!" cries the girl, kneeling down by her mother, and laying her head caressingly on the pillow beside the invalid; "but since you can not—"

"Since I can not," interrupts the other with decision, "you must go instead of me, and come back and tell me all about it. There, say no more. That is settled."

And settled, despite Betty's many tearful and compunctious remonstrances, it is. The day has come. Betty has, as nearly as possible, lost the train through her inability, at the last moment, to tear herself away from that shaded room and that couch that of late have been all her world.

"Are you sure that you can do without us? Are you sure that you will not miss us?" she reiterates, with her eyes full of tears; and half a dozen of Mr. Brewster's impatient "Bettys" are turned a deaf ear to by his daughter. But at last he gets her away; at last he gets her to the station and into the train. She had set off in a most unenjoying mood—apprehensive, half remorseful—but she has not gone five miles before nature and youth resume their inevitable sway. Did ever express train rush with so smooth a speed? and how pleasant once again to see the flying hedges, browsing sheep, smoky towns galloping away together. Gallop as they may, they are yet stationary, and she is tearing onward. What a feeling of superiority it gives one! And then, when London is reached, what can be more exhilarating and amusing than the streets? They seem to present a broad farce, got up and acted expressly for her entertainment. And the real farce to which they go in the evening? It is not very funny, but they laugh till they cry over it. Their mirth is so uncontrollable, indeed, that one or two persons in the stalls near them turn their heads to look in astonishment at them. But then, perhaps, these persons laugh every night. Mr. Brewster and his daughter are still laughing over the threadbare jests in their sitting-room at the hotel on their return. They are still laughing when Mr. Brewster leaves the room to give some directions to the servant for the next day. He is not absent more than ten minutes. On his return, he finds Betty standing in the middle of the room. Her face is turned toward him, but, as he sees at the first glance, it is not the same face as that with which he had

left her. There is no smile upon it, nor any expression of recognition. It wears the look which he has once before seen upon it—the sightless stare of a somnambulist. An indefinable terror seizes him as he goes up to her.

"What is the matter with you?" he asks, unsteadily. "Why do you look so odd?"

"We must go home," she says, speaking in a mechanical, immodulated voice, as one in a trance, to whom the words are dictated by some resistless alien power. "Mother is dead! She touched me on the foot as she went by."

They are nearly the same words as those which Mr. Brewster had heard his daughter employ on the occasion of her cousin's death; but this time he can meet them with no derisive incredulity. A sudden trembling has seized him, such as had seized upon his sick wife on that former occasion.

"What do you mean?" he asks, almost in a whisper—"did you—did you *see* her?"

She makes no answer; only moves slowly toward the door of the adjoining bedroom.

"Betty!" cries the father, in an agony of apprehension, following her, "you *must* speak! You have no right to say such things! What did you see? In God's name tell me what *did you* see?"

But she is as if she heard him not. Without making any answer she passes out of sight. Something tells him that it would be vain to make any further appeals to her. It is even extremely doubtful whether she was aware of his

presence. He throws himself into an arm-chair, and then, rising, begins to walk fast and feverishly up and down the room, in the vain endeavor to shake off the panic that is mastering him.

"The girl is of an exceptionally nervous organization. She has been upset by this sudden change from the long gloom of her past life; it is a form of hysteria."

But even as he says to himself these reassuring phrases, a cold reminiscence checks them. He had called her hysterical on the occasion of that former warning. His eyes fall accidentally on the clock. The hand points to half past twelve. The thought crosses his mind with a sort of relief that all the telegraph offices must be shut. The only sensible course to pursue is to dismiss the matter as quickly as possible from his mind, go to bed and dream, if he can compass it, of the farce, whose merriment seems now to be parted from him by a chasm. But to go to bed is one thing; to go to sleep another. Mr. Brewster finds the one as difficult as the other was easy. Reason as he may with himself, chide, ridicule his own folly, there is not one hour of the night or early morning that he does not hear told by all the church and hotel clocks. From the short, tired doze, into which he falls at last, he is awakened by the opening of the door, and springs back to consciousness with a frightened jump. Pooh! it is only his man with his hot water! And so it is. But, beside the hot water, what is it that his valet is carrying in his hand? Is it not an envelope, the first glimpse of whose color turns the master sick? In a second he has snatched it, torn it open, mastered its short contents, which, after all, he had

already known. "Come home at once. Mrs. Brewster died suddenly at twelve last night."

* * * * * * *

Mr. Brewster and his daughter have returned to the so lately left home. It is the day before the funeral, and they are sitting together in that heavy idleness which characterizes such dread days. It is a dark afternoon, and the gloom is so greatly deepened by the lowered blinds that occupation would be difficult. They are holding each other's hands, as if that helped them a little. For nearly an hour neither has spoken, but suddenly Mr. Brewster breaks the leaden silence.

"Betty," he says, in a low voice, "how did you know? Did you see her? I asked you at the time, but you did not answer me. You did not seem to hear."

She hears him now at all events, for her hand first trembles violently in his clasp, and is then withdrawn from it. But neither now does she answer.

"Tell me," repeats the father with imploring urgency. "Betty, tell me, did you see her?"

Betty has put up her hand to her forehead, and into her face has come an expression of dazed, bewildered misery.

"I don't know," she answers, uncertainly.

"You do not know?" repeats he, with gathering excitement; "you *must* know! Think, child, think! You can not have forgotten; did you really *see* her?"

The look of puzzled wretchedness grows intenser.

"Oh, do not ask me," she cries, loudly, in a voice of acute pain. "I would tell you if I could, but—I—I—do not know."

Her voice dies slowly away at the last word into a wail of misery, and on her forehead the intense look as of one agonizing to overtake a gone memory, grows more painfully evident. It would be inhumanity to urge her further, so the problem has to be left as unsolved as ever.

HER FOURTH VISION.

ANOTHER year has slipped by. Poor Mrs. Brewster's sudden death has long been superseded as a topic of conversation in the neighborhood by less threadbare ones. To tell the truth, it had never been a subject of universal lamentation. Even into the very earliest expressions of pity and regret have crept hopes, that, when the days of mourning for the poor lady are ended the house may be once more open for social purposes. And now that the year of conventional seclusion is running to its last sands, faint signs of such an impending reopening are not altogether wanting to gladden the hearts of the dancing boys and girls in the vicinage. Mr. Brewster is far from being an old man. At fifty-five, under healthy conditions, there is still a great deal of enjoying power left in a man, and Betty is undeniably a young woman. At twenty-two, in fact, she is, and looks, a younger woman than she was and did at twenty-one. Betty and her father would account it blasphemy were you to hint such a thing to them, but in point of fact they are a great deal happier than they were while their suffering Maria yet blessed them with her presence

and her sofa. The sofa had been reverently wheeled into a corner, the rooms are again full of light and air. Mr. Brewster need no longer tone down his hearty voice lest it should break into some doze, snatched fitfully at unexpected moments of the day. Betty need no longer cut short her stroll in the garden, or her rides in the lanes, in the fear that a faint, complaining voice may be summoning her, and she out of hearing. They have both, to do them justice, honestly tried to check the first weak germs of cheerfulness in themselves and each other, but in vain. Little innovations, for which neither knew whom to blame, have crept in somehow. The tennis ground, long disused, has been new-mown, rolled, and marked out; occasionally, a young man or a girl, driving over to call, has lured Betty, reluctant at first, half-shocked and yet hankering, into a game. Occasionally, too, one such young guest, a man, has stayed so late that it would be a breach of the first elements of hospitality not to invite him to stay to dinner. And somehow, after dinner—if one has a guest, one must do what one can to amuse him—all three have strayed into the billiard-room, and knocked the balls about till the stable clock has tolled midnight. This one guest, after a while, becomes singled out from the other chance comers, by the frequency and regularity of his appearances. Without any but a tacit invitation, he has fallen into the habit of coming, first on all Mondays; next on all Mondays and Fridays; then on all Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; by and by he occasionally throws in a Sunday, too; and sometimes a Saturday, if he has anything particular to say. Perhaps, being a moderately well-to-do-squire, with an

agent whom he has no reason for distrusting, and a house which, though of comfortable dimensions for two, is overroomy for one, he is thankful to find a complaisant small family on whom he can bestow his too abundant leisure. It is a Thursday evening, and Mr. Brewster and his daughter are sitting *tête-à-tête* after dinner; he turning over the sheets of the just-arrived "Globe," she placidly stitching opposite him, when a ring at the hall-door bell is heard through the house. Rings at the front door are, in the depth of the country, not common occurrences at nine o'clock in the evening, and are wont to excite surprise if not alarm. Such, however, is not the emotion provoked in the master of the house on this occasion. He looks over the top of his "Globe" at his daughter, who shows no great eagerness to meet his eye, and says, lifting his brows, with an expression half reproachful, half humorous, "Again, Betty? Why, I thought this was our free day, did not you?"

"Free day!" repeats Betty, stammering. "Free from what? I—I—don't know what you mean!"

"I am sure you do not; of course not; you can not give a guess," replies her father, dryly.

There is a smile on his lips, but his eyes are vexed. He has just begun to enjoy his life again, good, easy man, and in that enjoyment Betty's presence is a main factor. She hears, and is stung by the annoyance in his tone. Running impulsively over to him, she sits down on the floor at his knee.

"Do you think he comes too often?" she asks, trembling. "Do you mind?"

"It is to be hoped for my sake that I do not," rejoins he, still more dryly than before; then, lifting by force the girl's face, which she has buried on the arm of his chair, "Why, Betty, you are as red as a turkey cock. You traitor, you knew he was coming. Might I ask"—with an ungovernable intonation of bitterness and alarm—"whether he has anything particular to say?"

Steps are heard in the hall. The servants, who have not hurried themselves, are going to the door. She must make haste to answer.

"Do you mind?" she repeats, agitatedly. "If you do, he shall go away; he shall say nothing."

For a moment Mr. Brewster struggles, and it would be, perhaps, rash to say that no malediction against his future son-in-law formulates itself in his heart. Then, his natural unselfishness, which was kept in high training through many years by his sainted Maria, conquers, and he says cheerfully, "Mind? Why should I mind? Do you think that I want to have a cranky old maid on my hands?" Then, as the door opens and the guest is announced, "How are you, Carrington? Very glad to see you."

Two months later Carrington and Betty are made one. Mr. Brewster has been the life of the wedding party, has made a better speech and more jokes, and has thrown more shoes and rice than any other member of the company. When the last guest has gone he shuts himself into his study and cries like a child. Then he has his portmanteau packed, and takes the night mail for London and Paris. His empty house, void now both of his poor, peevish Maria and his consoling Betty, is more than he can bear. He is

absent above a year, his travels being extended beyond the familiar bounds of Europe to China and Japan. What is there to bring him back? But at the end of the year there is something. Does not obligation lie upon him to go home and see Betty's baby? The thought of Betty with a baby makes him laugh, albeit tenderly. And then, at the close of a long summer day's traveling, comes the reunion with Betty herself. Betty, who can not hang long enough about his neck, or reproach him fondly enough with his protracted absence, or tell him often enough how she has wearied for a sight of his face. And yet, he thinks to himself, with a sort of semi-bitterness, "Can any one so blooming have wearied much really?"

His Betty was a pale, shut bud, this Betty is an expanded flower, that has opened its petals wide to the sun of happiness—that sun which he had never been able to make shine upon her. But, in time, honestly struggled against, this bitterness goes. His daughter's unfeigned delight in his company, the ruthless way in which she makes every one's convenience—even adored husband's and worshiped baby's—courtesy to his, could not fail to soothe a self-love more susceptible than Mr. Brewster's. His visit prolongs itself from days to weeks, from weeks to months. His daughter is always pressing upon him her loving importunities that he should live with them. "Why should you *ever* go?" she asks, for the hundredth time, on the evening preceding the day he has at length finally fixed upon for his departure. "Jack says he does not know what he shall do without you."

"Perhaps time and the consolations of religion may

reconcile him to the blow," replies Mr. Brewster, with a little mild satire.

"He says he can not account for my not being nicer than I am, having such a father," pursues Betty, wheedlingly; "come, you have not answered me; why should not you stay with us always?"

"I must not make myself too common, Betty," says he, jestingly; "if I lived with you, you could not make such a fuss with me as you have been doing for the last three months. I like to be made a fuss with."

And this is all the answer she gets out of him, and so she has to let him go, but not without plenteous tears and strenuous adjurations to return, before the month is out, for good. He has now been gone a week. For the first day or two after losing him, his daughter's spirits drooped extremely; but before long, her youth, the happy conditions of her life, her husband's good humor, and the baby's allurements restore her equanimity. It is an August evening, hot and fair, and Betty has stepped out of the dining-room window, according to her wont on such evenings, to bid the sleepy flowers good-night, and hail the moon, the great, red, harvest moon wheeling up above the beech-wood, and waited on by her silver handmaid stars. Mr. Carrington remains at the dining-table, sipping his claret, and looking out contentedly at the flitting white figure that now and then stops to throw in an affectionate glance at him, and an enthusiastic ejaculation as to the loveliness of the night, to which latter he responds with all a Briton's unexpansive brevity. For a moment or two the figure has disappeared—gone, no doubt, to visit its Night

Stocks, and Mr. Carrington has fallen into a placid reverie on beeves and farming implements, when he is startled by the sound of a sharp cry from the direction of the garden. To jump up and fly through the window is with him the work of a moment. He has, after all, not far to go. At a hundred paces from him on the terrace, he sees his wife standing, and, as he nears her, perceives that she is gazing before her in a blank, unseeing way. Surprised and frightened, he takes her by the arm, crying, "What is it?"

"Father is dead," she says, in a voice of acute agony; not as if answering him, nor even being aware of his presence. "I know it; he touched me on the head as he went by."

"Betty," cries the young man, puzzled and frightened, "what is the matter? What are you talking about?"

He knows nothing of her visions. It is not a subject, which, since her father's last appeal to her for explanation, on the occasion of her mother's death, has been mentioned between him and her. Much less has any breath of them ever reached an outsider. She does not answer. She only gazes stonily straight before her in the moonlight. A cold terror seizes on Carrington. Has she gone mad? In an instant the thought has flashed through his mind. Is there madness in her family? Can he ever formerly have heard a whisper of, and forgotten it? If not, is this the beginning of some frightful illness, some hideous catalepsy? He catches her hand. It is cold and rigid.

"Betty! Betty! why do you frighten me so? What is it? For God's sake, speak!"

But she turns away from him, and begins to walk

dumbly toward the house. He overtakes her, and now, thoroughly alarmed, catches her in his arms, "Betty, what have I done to you? Will not you speak to me? You must speak."

Still she is silent, nor can any adjuration, however solemn, or entreaty, however tender, succeed in drawing one further word from her. Before he knows it she has slipped out of his arms and made her way in-doors. Mr. Carrington passes a dreadful night, entirely sleepless, and crowded with hideous fears. Before his eyes, whether shut or open, the specter madness does not cease to dance. On what other hypothesis can he explain his wife's sudden seizure? Is it the first of the kind, or has she previously been subject to such? This is one of the problems that torment him, and that he has no means of solving. There is no old nurse or other faithful family servant, whom he can consult upon the point. His wife's maid came to her only at her marriage. He has not had the heart to go to bed, but has seen from his dressing-room window, with the tired eyes of one that has all night watched, the stars go out, and the new day that in August still comes early, unfolding one after another and putting on its many-colored robes of splendor. Will this day solve his riddle for him? His head aches, and his eyeballs burn. Perhaps the morning wind may make him feel less stupefied. Having listened at Betty's door and heard no sound—perhaps she may be in a wholesome sleep, from which she may wake cured and sane—he goes down-stairs and out-of-doors. As he is walking toward the stable, drawing in long breaths of the exquisite summer air, he sees a telegraph boy approaching

him. "For me?" he asks, indifferently, as the messenger holds out his missive to him, and so absently opens it, his thoughts full of his own trouble—so full that for the first moment they do not grasp the meaning of the words presented to his eye: "Mr. Brewster seized with apoplexy last night at nine o'clock; dead in ten minutes; come or send directions." For a moment, he reels as if he were drunk, Betty's words rushing back in ghastly letters of fire before his mind's eye. She knew it at the very time it had happened! Great God! *how* did she know it?

HER FIFTH AND LAST VISION.

It was no great wonder that after such a shock Betty falls dangerously ill. For weeks she lies between life and death, and months elapse before she is restored to her former strength. Her husband nurses her with devoted and untiring tenderness; sits by her through long night after long night, listening to her wanderings—(for she is often delirious)—wanderings about the long-departed playfellow of her childhood, Rachel; about dear, dead dogs and birds; about her sick mother; nay, most of all, about her father too. And yet, listen as closely as he may, not once does he catch any least word as to the mysterious seizure and the unexplained forewarning which had preceded that father's death. Not even in highest delirium, when the bonds of reason are loosened, and the thoughts and feelings deepest buried come to the surface, does she make any most distant allusion to it. It must be gone from her

mind as completely as if it had never found a resting-place there. After a long time she creeps slowly back to convalescence, an uncertain, precarious convalescence, at first, but which gradually gains in solidity and dependableness as the languid days go by. Days passed in lying for the most part, silent and pale in her great arm-chair, pressing occasionally her husband's hand, as he sits fondly at her feet, or stroking his hair, and occasionally breaking into faint smiles at the antics of the baby, who has taken the opportunity of her mother's illness to double herself in size, and has adopted a mode of progressing along the floor from chair leg to chair leg, which Betty, not having much acquaintance with other babies, thinks original, and admires with proportionate ecstasy. After awhile, the hand that had feebly patted Carrington's head rests on his arm, as he leads her, warmly wrapped up, to the nearest of her garden haunts. The first day she does not get further than the terrace. The last time that she had visited it, was the evening on which he had found her cold and struck in the moonlight. His memory is full of this circumstance, as he leads her slowly along; but it seems to have no place in hers. Perhaps it is the entirely changed aspect of the scene, from summer moonlight to winter sunshine that keeps recollection at bay. She makes little, interested comments upon the rimy grass, the frost-bound flower borders, upon the removal of some remembered shrub, but no ripple seems to stir the waters of any deeper memory.

Seeing her so insensible, he can not resist experimentalizing upon her, so far as to pause at the exact spot upon which, on that fatal night, he had found her standing.

But she only looks up at him, smiling out of her furs, her thin face a little tinted by the sharp wind, and asks:

"What are you stopping for? You need not think that I am tired yet." He looks earnestly into her eyes, but they are obviously entirely unconscious, as is the brain behind them, of the remembrances of which his are full. It is clear that he must defer any probing of memory until she is fully restored to health. And when at length—it is indeed at length—this comes to pass, his mind has taken such a habit of anxiety for his fragile treasure, that he shrinks from imperiling the hardly won good by presenting to her mind any images but those that are smiling and cheerful. From day to day he defers the putting of that question which is so often at the end of his tongue, and so it comes to pass that it is never asked at all. Time, as he goes by, brings many good things to the Carringtons, and so far—and now the baby is three years old—no bad ones. If there are any drawbacks to the fact of possessing an only child, even they will shortly be removed, for Betty hopes, ere long, to embrace a son. She is looking forward with strong longings, and without any fear, to the expected blessing.

No dreams or visions, or eerie warnings of any kind have disturbed her placid prosperity. The season is as prosperous as she, and now, in late June, the farmers are garnering their heavy hay crops without a drop of rain, and life is one long fragrant feast with the strawberry beds for board. Mr. Carrington has set off upon a long day's trout fishing—an elastic sort of little excursion, which may end to-night, may be prolonged till to-morrow.

"Do not hurry back," says Betty, bidding her husband good-bye; "enjoy yourself, old man! I am only afraid" —glancing from the absolutely unclouded sky to the rather parched grass—"that you will find the river a little low." And so, in the early morning, she waves him a smiling farewell, leaning in her cool white gown against the porch, and crying cheerfully, "Bring me home plenty of trout!"

The day turns out a very hot one, but what matter to one who can sit under a great beech's shade all day, with a cabbage leaf full of strawberries beside her, and engaged in no severer exertion than to watch little Betty tumbling in the hay, and occasionally set her dislocated hat straight again upon her yellow curls. There seems a slight want of imagination in having christened the child Betty, too, and so the elder Betty pointed out to her husband.

"Will not it make a great confusion having two Bettys?" she asked. But he, in all the hot and foolish ardor of young husbandhood, asseverates that there can not be too much of a good thing; there can not be too many Bettys. She lifts her eyebrows with a languid smile.

"Then if we have six daughters they will all be Bettys!" But this extravagant supposition he refuses to face. And now little Betty's bed-time has come. It is hard work to tear her away, kicking and screaming, from the sympathetic hay-makers. It is hard work to get her into her bath, and it is harder still to get her out again. Far and wide the water splashes, and the soap-suds fly under the excited plunges of her fat legs. The delights of the day have almost turned her little brain. Laughing, crying, wildly hilarious; finally, very tired and outrageously cross,

she is at length laid in bed, and almost before her naughty gold head has touched the pillow, is asleep.

"Fast as a rock," says the nurse, bending admiringly over her. So fast that neither nurse nor mother need lower their voices as they discuss with the grave interest that befits so momentous a theme, what frock little Betty is to wear at a strawberry-eating and hay-making party in the neighborhood to which she is to be taken on the morrow.

"Of course, she looks best in white," says the nurse, thoughtfully reviewing the little garments spread out for inspection; "it shows up her skin best. I never saw such a skin, if you will believe me, ma'am. I really can not tell sometimes where the child's frock ends and her neck begins."

"She is as fair as a lily," assents the mother, proudly.

"She has got shockingly tanned to-day," pursues the nurse, regretfully. "I could not get her to keep her hat on. As fast as I put it on she tore it off again. She was like a mad thing, and I did want her to look her best to-morrow."

"But she will," rejoins the mother, fondly. "She is a most satisfactory child; she always looks her best when one wants her. Bring out some more of her frocks. I do not quite like any of these."

The nurse complies, and walking to a high press, sacred to little Betty's voluminous wardrobe, begins to pull out drawers and choose the daintiest of the many little changes of raiment lying there in lavender. Her mistress does not interrupt her by any comment or suggestion. When her selection is at length made, the nurse returns toward her

mistress with a heap of little clothes thrown over her arm. She is so occupied in turning them over, that she does not look up until she is quite close to Mrs. Carrington, when, lifting her eyes, she becomes aware that the latter, with an ash-white face and a terrible blank look, is putting up both her hands, as if keeping off from herself something unspeakably feared and terrible.

"I must die to-morrow!" she says, in a voice so changed, so full of awe and horror, as to be almost unrecognizable. "I know. *It* touched me on the heart as it went by."

"Good God, ma'am, what is the matter? What ails you? *What* touched you?" shrieks the nurse, beside herself with vague fear.

But her mistress makes no answer, and only falls from her chair on the floor in a dead, dead swoon.

* * * * * * *

The river has not been so low as Mr. Carrington feared, the sky too has clouded over opportunely, and he has had better sport than he hoped for. He has fished on and on and on; down and down the river, until it was too late to return home that night; so he puts up at a little river-side ale-house, well known to him of old; dines hungrily on some of his own trout, and, sleeping sweetly, dreams of May-flies and ginger hackles. All next day he fishes again; and it is not till evening that he at length sees his own house rise before him against the rose-red sunset. He has walked from the station. Since he had not sent word at what hour he was to be expected, no vehicle awaits him. But the distance is short, and he enjoys the walk, with the

prospect of Betty's smile and some more trout at the end of it. "How early they have shut up the house," he says to himself as he comes within sight of the building, and becomes aware that all the blinds are drawn down. "What is the meaning of that, I wonder?" A little puzzled, but not alarmed, he walks in, and, entering the house by the garden-door, looks into his wife's boudoir. She is not there. Into the drawing-room, she is not there; the library, not there; the smoking-room, not there. He passes out upon the terrace and calls "Betty, Betty," but there is no answer. "Pooh! how stupid; of course she has gone up to dress for dinner." He runs lightly upstairs and turns the handle of his wife's bedroom door. It is locked. What does this mean? He calls "Betty, Betty, open the door." But she does not answer. The idea strikes him that he can enter by his dressing-room. Yes, its door is not locked. In one moment he has passed through it and is in the bedroom. Why are his legs beginning to shake under him? The light is dim, the blinds pulled down to the bottom, and no candles lighted. Betty can not be here; surely she is not here. Involuntarily his eye falls on the bed. *What is this?* There is a great white sheet drawn over it, and beneath that sheet an outline. In a second (how he gets there he never knows) he is at the bedside, the sheet is turned down, and he has learned what lies beneath it. His Betty dead and rigid, with a dead baby beside her! For *it*, whatever the mysterious messenger was, has kept its word.

THE END.

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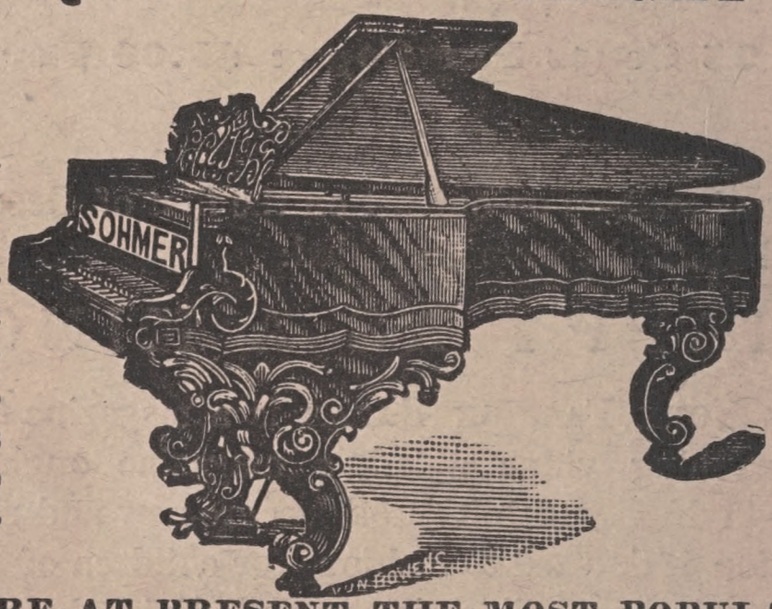

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